5 One-Word Steps to Creating an Amazing Resume
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Making a resume seems scary. Like paying a bill or going to an interview, it's some adulting thing you're not certain you're ready to tackle just yet.

I've got a secret. It's actually kind of easy. So much so I kinda feel bad charging people for me to help them with theirs. So here, for the first time in print, are the 5 One-Word Steps I walk students through to help them create an amazing resume. Steps 1-3 take about 5 minutes each. Steps 4 and 5 take as long as you want but at least half an hour each. (For those keeping track, this means you could have a solid resume about an hour and a half from now… less if you already have a draft of some kind.)

Step #1: Jot

Scribble down/type up every single thing you've done since the end of 8th grade that wasn't sleeping or watching a screen. Clubs, sports and activities are the first things people think of. Start with those.

Got a couple? Now dig deeper. Do you go to church/synagogue/mosque? Do you work? Do you fix computers or play the stock market? Do you have a Youtube channel or take care of siblings while your parents work?

It ALL counts. Don't filter.

True Story

In high school, I made chainmaille and helped build trebuchets (those counterweighted catapulty things) for Roman battle reenactments. I also owned three of those quarter gumball machines you see in auto/barber shops and used the money to pay for gas money and insurance for my Oldsmobile. I also applied for a grant and convinced a bunch of my friends to help me paint our elementary gym's wood bleachers one summer. All of this went on my college applications. I like to think these activities were a heck of a lot more interesting to the person reading my application than putting down Beta Club (for which I did nothing but sign up).

Now make sure you have everything. Use the CommonApp's Activities Section drop-down menu of activity types to jog your memory. Here's a condensed list for your convenience.

- Academic/Science/Math
- Art/Dance/Music (Instrumental/Vocal)/Theatre//Drama
- Athletics: Club/JV/Varsity
- Career-Oriented (ex. FBLA, FFA, HOSA, DECA)
- Community Service (Volunteer Work)

- Computer/Technology/Robotics
- Cultural/Foreign Exchange/Foreign Language
- Debate/Speech
- Environmental/LGBT/Social Justice
- Family Responsibilities
- Internship
- Journalism/Publication/Research
- Junior ROTC
- Religious
- School Spirit
- Student Government/Politics
- Work (Paid)
- Other
- Honors/Awards

Ask your mom/dad/grandma/anyone who might like to brag about you. They'll remember.

Got absolutely everything? Great. Next step.

Step #2: Bucket

Take a look at your list. What things go together? Write them together and name the group. You can name it anything you want. I'd avoid "Clubs" or "Sports" unless absolutely necessary. Here are some examples to give you ideas:

- Activism
- Campaign Experience
- Church Volunteer Activities
- Science Exploration
- Career Exploration
- International Summer Experiences
- Work Experience
- Personal Enrichment/Projects

Your buckets tell the reader what flavor of student you are *quickly*: "a ballerina who dabbles in reptile research," "a lacrosse player who works at ChickFilA and is bilingual", "an activist who likes to paint/play music and work summer camps."

This said, try your best to give the bucket a *specific* name to let the reader know exactly what's in it. A student with a couple sports might just put "Athletics" but a student who plays many sports may split into buckets of "School Athletics" and "Club Sports" or maybe "Baseball" and "Additional Fitness".

Try your best to make every "bucket" have more than one thing in it. One exception...

Is one activity so big that you could probably put subheadings under it? It can stand alone. For example, "Boy Scouts" is "one" activity but if you've ever been in scouts, you know that it's tons of things under a giant umbrella of "Scouting:" high adventure courses, local troop, councils, Eagle Scout, camp and more all fall under this one activity.

If something from Step 1 isn't really fitting into a category with anything else, and it doesn't hold enough weight to stand on its own, you can cut it for now if you like.

Step #3 Prioritize

Now that you have all your "buckets," it's time to let your reader know what's most important about you.

How do I know what's important?

For a job, it's what experiences you have that best line up with that particular position. (Which is why, btw, you should change up your resume between job applications as needed and not just blast the same resume everywhere.)

But what about college? Well, this is a bit trickier, but I think I've figured out a way to help you decide what's really important that you want to share and that colleges want to know about. Ready?

Next to each of your activities, I want you to write three numbers (on a scale of 1 to 5) that score the activity on three measures:
1. Continuity: How long have you done this?
    - 1 = one time
    - 5= 4+ years
2. Depth of Commitment: How many hours do you spend on this activity when it's "in season"?
    - 1= an hour a month, if that
    - 5 = 20+ hours of my week is spent doing or traveling/preparing for this activity
3. Impact: How much of what's done in this activity is because of your efforts?
    - 1= if I didn't show up, no one would notice/the work would get done
    - 5 = I am the founder/president/leader who oversees the work and without me it doesn't happen

Activities with the highest scores need to be at the top of your list.
Example: Don't start off with "babysitting" and save the fact that you won a National Robotics competition until the end! Put that Robotics Competition front and center! Don't make them hunt for it because, in the immortal words of Sweet Brown, "ain't nobody got time for that."

Decided which order your buckets are going in? Good. Now just put the activities in each bucket in order by what you've done the most/recently: for example, played Flute 9-12 goes first, then played guitar 11, then played piano 9-10.

Now you're ready for the single most important step.

Step #4 Describe

The high school I used to serve at had a group called "Junior Civitans." Everyone at the school knew what they did, except me. Did they encourage people to vote? Pick up highway trash? Maybe repair flags? So I asked and learned that they worked with students with special needs and coordinated the Special Olympics we hosted each year. Never woulda guessed.

Don't make your resume a guessing game. Your reader needs to know exactly what **you** did. The mantra here is "They don't know what you don't tell them." Anyone reading your resume wants to understand the type and scope of work you put in. If you don't tell them, they're going to assume you did the bare minimum of "show up and eat the snacks."

Common Struggles for Students in Step 4

● Focusing on the group instead of your individual contribution:

Say you're the president of your Student Council. Cool. Good job. Why is the Student Council better off with you as its president instead of someone else? What have **you** done to improve the group and the people it serves? With great power...

Easier question: what exactly is it that you do with this activity?

Blah Group-focused answer: "We organize the annual Special Olympics"
Better Individual-focused answer: "Coordinate donations with local food vendors for annual Special Olympics"

● Using wimpy verbs: "did" "help" or "participate"
You get a maximum of one of each of these words per resume. You can do better. Type "Resume verbs" into google and you will find a deluge of resources to help you amp up your

language. Word of caution: please don't use a word in your resume unless you are absolutely comfortable using it in conversation.

- Skimpy Details:

You raised money? How much? Collected cans? How many?
You played hockey? Did you win anything? Even "Most Improved"?
You make jewelry? What materials do you use? How much do you charge?
Quantify and add anything that will help your reader understand that you worked hard.

Note: If you just showed up and ate the cookies, you're going to have a tough time here and may have to fall back on the group as long as you did help. Honesty is essential.

Example time:
Let me put this together to show you what I mean.

Example 1:

Soccer, sophomore year to present

I play varsity soccer. I play defender and goalie. I'm a captain. We were state champs. (87 characters)

NOPE. Heading is non-descriptive and not easy to read. Uses "I" repeatedly. Buries the good stuff at the end. Very little description. Boring despite great potential.

Example 2:

Soccer, MHS Varsity 2017-2020

Serve as co-captain. Led team to state championship. Play defender/alternate goalie. Good at corner kicks. (106 characters)

Much better. Concise so it allows for more information in less space. More organized with important stuff first. It passes!

Example 3:

Varsity Soccer, Mooresville Senior High School 10, 11, 12

Appointed co-captain by head coach after being nominated by peers. Led team to state championship where we won for the first time in 5 years. Play right defender and alternate goalie. Specialize in corner kicks.

(212 characters)

Wow! Look at that detail! And the verbs! Amazing. So impressive. A+++

Describing your activities in this much detail takes some time, but it's absolutely worth it.

You can go ahead to the next step, even if you're not finished with this step. You can always add more descriptions.

Step #5 Format

You've done the hard work of laying everything out. Now it's back to the easy stuff.

Find a resume template you like. Google Docs has some good ones. Fill in all the blanks with all your information and tinker until it's just right.

Here are some guidelines that will likely answer the questions you stumble across during this step.

Non-negotiable Formatting Rules

- Stylistic Continuity
  You can't change fonts or how you order things halfway through. Imagine if every item in this list had a different kind of bullet point. That would be pointless and a bit irritating. Don't do that.
  The most common example of this in student resumes is year-formatting. If you put "9th, 10th, 11th, 12th" for one activity, don't put "9-12" or "9/10/11/12" or "12, 11, 10, and 9" or any other variation elsewhere. It doesn't matter which you pick but please be kind to your reader and stick with the same thing throughout to avoid confusion.

- Simple to Read
  No crazy/scripty fonts or weird colors. No tiny letters (size 10 is likely the smallest you can get away with).

- Uses Negative Space
  For fellow non-artists, let me explain. Negative space is the empty space between things on a page. Most templates utilize this already, but I want to point

out that it's important that your resume page(s) not be so jam packed that your reader is overwhelmed. Spacing things out is good.

- Length
  Front and back of one page maximum. If you're applying to college as a high school senior, you have lived long enough to justify it being any longer. (If [a former president](#) can do it in one page, you can do it in two.) Exceptions to this are only allowed if you are explicitly asked for more.

Matters of Preference

- Education/Classes/Test Scores
  If you're proud of them and have room, or are sending this resume to some organization that may not have this information readily available, go ahead and add it in. If you don't want to highlight it, there are some nifty resume templates that let you put stuff in a side column. Or just don't put it in.

- Font Choice (within reason)
- Layout/Template Choice

Unneeded for College Applications
- Personal Summary/Objective
  I think it's clear that your objective is to get into college/win the scholarship, but if you want this and have room, go for it.
- References
  That's what letters of recommendation are for.
- "Hobbies/Interests"
  Beekeeping? Sweet. Blacksmithing? Cool. Unless you are prepared to describe that activity (see Step 4) please don't just list it. Who doesn't like to "travel, read and go to the beach/mountains"? Make it informative, really interesting or leave it off.
- "Skills"
  Please don't list which Microsoft programs you're certified in at the bottom to fill space. If this is important to you, then surely you've incorporated it into an activity elsewhere. List these under that activity.
  If you're bilingual, you've likely already indicated this on your application, but this is about the only thing I can think of that would go here.

You made it! You now have a resume in hand (or will very soon). Go forth and share what you've learned about resumes so that the world can be further rid of boring, uninformative, unorganized and generally useless ones.